

cultural exchange

in the garment factory where I work  
all the young Chinese guys are  
kung-fu freaks  
they're always kicking at each other  
punching boxes & hissing & spitting  
moving sideways like crabs  
showing me Chinese movie magazines  
pictures of kung-fu heroes  
smeared with blood  
kicking their front legs up  
seven feet or more.

they take in two or three movies a week  
& the plot is almost always the same:  
there is a small Chinese village  
it looks somehow like an old western town  
& the place is being terrorized  
by some Japanese villains  
they go around grimacing, making ugly faces  
killing women & children  
like marauding Indians  
until a slim hipped hero emerges &  
kicks the shit out of hundreds of  
fat Japs  
& he never has to worry about  
running out of bullets.

most of these guys are students  
they study business or accounting  
have their hair done  
so it doesn't look so straight  
go to ball games when they  
run out of kung-fu movies.

their young anglo co-workers come in  
carrying Lao-tzu & talking of  
buddhism & last night's opium.

the failed novelist

he watches tv every night  
I see the blue glow from my place  
stays up till dawn  
watching old movies  
hosted by a used car salesman  
talks about that salesman  
like he was a drinking buddy.

spent years writing the novel  
living the bohemian life in Paris  
then came home & started collecting  
rejection slips  
doesn't write much anymore  
says whenever he gets going  
something snaps & he finds  
he's writing the same thing  
all over again.

in conversation he is sometimes brilliant  
when he's had enough to drink  
telling stories & cracking jokes  
as much aglow as the tv.

he has this ninety year old aunt  
living down the peninsula  
can't ever remember talking to her  
about anything but his bowels  
she just assumed everyone was constipated  
used to make his lunch  
when he was a kid  
never failed to give him the shits.

recently she sent him a care package  
for his birthday  
the usual t-shirts & drawers & socks  
plus a bag of prunes &  
a few hard boiled eggs.

she hoped all was well with him  
the brief note said  
& that he was regular.

the suffering artist

he gets drunk & starts insulting everyone  
it's always the same  
a bunch of people sitting around  
drinking beer & talking  
& suddenly he whips out his suffering  
exposes his bleeding heart  
like a pervert in a raincoat  
there you are, look at that  
I'm suffering, heh heh.

no one knows what he's talking about  
no one else suffers  
or at least not like he suffers  
he's an artist  
& that makes everything okay